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RURAL SCHOOL DAYS: KANSAS IN 1920

TEACHERS PACKET



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Rural School Days: Kansas in 1920

For the Teacher

Rural School Days: Kansas in 1920 offers students a unique opportunity to experience history. The **one-hour program** offers all students a chance to learn about life in a country school; the **four-hour program** is an extended living history activity for fourth and fifth grade students that takes place in Potawatomi Baptist Mission and the historic one-room Stach School.

During the one-hour program students act as pupils of the 1920s, sit at wooden desks, practice penmanship, and play a recess game. The four-hour program includes additional lessons, a spelling bee, and a period for lunch. For both programs an interpreter in period clothes leads the experience. She will be in character as a 1920's teacher.

Upon completion of the pre-visit activities and participation the Rural School Days program, students will be able to:

- Compare and contrast a school day in 1920 with their present school day,
- Identify four subjects taught in rural schools,
- Distinguish between the role of the teacher in 1920 and the present, and
- Explain why most one-room schools closed.

History of the Stach School

The Stach School was built in Jackson County (northwest of Topeka). John Stach, Sr. donated the one-acre section of land for the school when it was organized in 1877. Like many other one-room schools, it was named for the family who provided the land.

The Stach School offered classes for grades one through nine all in one room and with one teacher. Subjects taught included arithmetic, spelling, history, civics, hygiene, and penmanship. The school day began at 9a.m. and usually ended around 4p.m. Children walked, rode bikes, or rode a horse or mule to get to school in 1920. There were two recesses and an hour lunch. Children would play games during recess; in early years there was no playground equipment but in the 1920s a merry-go-round was added.

The average number of pupils enrolled in the Stach School from 1910 to 1920 was 35 to 45, although actual daily attendance rarely reached this number. The Stach School closed in 1956 due to low enrollment. As a result of local school consolidations the school had only six pupils that year. This decline was typical of what happened in rural schools across Kansas during this period. The Stach School was moved to the museum grounds in 1984, restored, and opened to the public in 1989.

Clothing (Four-Hour Program Only)

Students participating in the four-hour program are encouraged to dress the part for their visit to the Stach School. The standard outfit for boys was bibbed overalls with cotton or flannel shirts and a cap. Blue jeans or old suit pants would also be appropriate. Sneakers were introduced in 1917 but most boys wore leather work shoes. Girls wore cotton or wool dresses that came just below the knees. White or black cotton tights were worn with leather shoes. **The Stach School is heated by a coal-burning stove in the winter and cooled in the spring and summer by opening the windows, so students should dress accordingly.**

Lunch (Four-Hour Program Only)

For the four-hour program, each student must bring a lunch and a drinking cup. Lunch will be eaten either on the porch of the schoolhouse or inside (if inclement weather). Water will be provided for your group. Lunches in 1920 were often carried in simple tin pails, usually recycled lard pails or syrup cans. Lunch for the students often meant leftovers from the evening before!

An accurate 1920s lunch could include:

a ham, bacon, cheese or egg sandwich

hard-boiled eggs

cornbread or pancakes

biscuits with butter and jelly

apples, pears or dried fruit (*only fruit grown locally and in season*)

fried chicken or ham

baked sweet potatoes

buttered bread

raw vegetables

pie, cake, or cookies

Remember, the year is 1920 so do not use or bring: plastic bags or aluminum foil, plastic containers, potato chips, paper napkins, pop/soda, or Styrofoam or plastic cups. Waxed paper and brown paper wrapping was used in 1920.

Acting the Part

When your students enter the Stach School, the year is 1920. Please remind them of this before coming to the program. Students will be expected to raise their hand to ask or answer a question. As in 1920, when the teacher recognizes the student, he or she will stand beside the desk, ask or answer the question, and then sit down. Students in 1920 were not permitted to talk with one another during lessons. The Stach School teacher will expect silence during lessons.

Discipline

Discipline was usually not a major problem at rural schools. Pupils attended school with brothers, sisters, and cousins. Additionally, as part of their compensation, some teachers boarded with various families during the school year. Parents quickly learned of any pranks and disciplined children at home for any infraction. For misbehaving students, teachers often gave swats with a switch.

Daily Lessons

Each grade came to the recitation bench or the front seats for lessons. Everybody else would remain seated and study. A typical morning in the one-room school would be as follows:

9:00	Opening Exercises	All grades
9:20	Reading	Grade 1
9:30	Reading	Grade 2
9:40	Reading	Grade 3
9:50	Civics	Grades 8 & 9
10:00	Reading	Grade 4
10:10	Reading	Grade 6
10:20	Reading	Grade 7
10:30	Recess	All grades
10:45	Numbers	All grades
10:55	Arithmetic	Grade 1
11:05	Arithmetic	Grades 2 & 3
11:15	History	Grades 8 & 9
11:25	Arithmetic	Grades 4 & 5
11:35	Arithmetic	Grades 6 & 7
Noon	Lunch	All grades

This example is based on the 1919-1920 Stach School Daily Program register completed by then teacher, Clara Mahon.

Pre-Visit Activities

1. PowerPoint Presentation

Prepare your students for their visit to the Stach School by showing the 16-image PowerPoint available for download at www.kshs.org/teachers/tours/ruralschool.htm. The presentation contains historical photographs and information on the one-room school and rural education in Kansas.

2. Sample Lessons

A. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was originally written in 1892. In 1923 the term “my flag” was changed to “the flag of the United States of America,” and in 1954 the phrase “under God” was added. An accurate 1920 reading of the Pledge of Allegiance would be:

*I pledge allegiance to my flag and to the Republic, for which it stands,
one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

B. Recitation

Memorization was a vital part of the one-room school experience. Pick a favorite poem and have the children stand and recite together aloud. As a test, call them up to your desk to recite the poem individually. Remember, good posture is important – stand up straight, feet facing forward, chins up, and hands to our sides!

For an authentic 1920's experience, try memorizing this poem for recitation in your classroom.

Four-Leaf Clover

I know a place where the sun is like gold,
And the cherry blooms burst with snow;
And down underneath is the loveliest nook,
Where the four-leaf clovers grow.

One leaf is for hope, and one is for faith,
And one is for love, you know,
But God put another in for luck –
If you search, you will find where they grow.

You must have hope and you must have faith,
You must love and be strong, and so,
If you work, if you wait, you will find the place,
Where the four-leaf clovers grow.

C. Spelling Bee

Have a 1920s spelling bee! Have the students stand beside their desk and go up and down the rows asking the spelling words. If a student misspells a word, they should be seated. Teachers in 1920 used the “Say, Spell, Say” method: students must say the word, spell it, and then say the word again.

The following words were commonly used in a 1920's schoolhouse and will be used in the spelling bee during the four-hour program:

arithmetic	ash bucket	belfry	blackboard	box supper
cistern	cloakroom	coal	coal house	dipper
handkerchief	hygiene	influenza	lard	lye soap
mud scraper	nib	normal school	obedience	one-room
school	orthography	outhouse	phonograph	pot-bellied stove
prairie	privy	pump	pupil	recitation
silence	slate	spelling bee	squirm	student
wash basin	water pail			

D. Recess Game

Practice playing “Follow the Leader” – a favorite game in 1920.

E. Homemade Lunch Pails

This activity is especially fun for those participating in the four-hour program and who will be bringing their lunch to the Stach School.

Collect a large (3 lb) coffee can for each student. Drill 2 holes near the rim on opposite sides and then paint the cans silver. Use twine to make a short handle. Cover the pail with a handkerchief or scrap of fabric.

3. Short Stories

To help students understand the day-to-day life of a child in 1920, read the following short story, based on the experiences of a real Stach School pupil that eventually became a teacher at the one-room school house.

Discussion questions are provided at the end of each section.

Going to School

Part I: Meet Leo

Leo was ten. It was Sunday night and he and his sister Margaret could not wait for tomorrow to arrive.

Monday was the first day of school at Stach School! How exciting! Just yesterday, Mother had taken them into town to go back-to-school shopping. He came home with a pencil, some lined paper, a slate, slate pencil, and a brand-new pair of overalls. He knew if he could just fall asleep that it would soon be Monday morning.

Leo's family, the Simecks, live near Delia, in Jackson County, Kansas. His father farms and his mother raises the family. The Simecks work very hard on their farm. Leo's father begins each day before sunrise. While Leo's mother makes breakfast, Leo's father goes outside to begin chores – feeding the horses, milking the cows, watering the chickens. Meanwhile, in the kitchen Mrs. Simecks busily makes biscuits in a cracked mixing bowl her mother brought over with her from Czechoslovakia on the boat. She kneads and pounds, rolls and flattens, and pats out twelve round biscuits that she bakes in the oven.

"Not so much, Leo! It will rot your teeth," Mrs. Simecks reminds him every morning as he heaps his favorite tomato preserves on each side of the buttery biscuits. His mother makes tomato preserves each August with tomatoes fresh from the garden. She also makes sweet jelly with raspberries from bushes his father planted along the edge of the chicken house, plum jelly from the juicy plums Leo picks along the bank of Dutch Creek, and strawberry jam from the tiny wild strawberries that grow in the pasture along the crumbling rock fence.

Mother and Margaret spend a lot of time baking, cooking, preparing meals, sewing, mending, and gardening. They also do laundry every Monday. Mother washes clothes with homemade soap that stings her chapped hands and Margaret helps out by lifting the heavy, wet clothing to the clothesline and hanging them up to dry.

While Margaret helps her mother, Leo helps his father with the farm. It is Leo's job to milk the cows twice a day. He loves going out to the pasture, cupping his hands to his mouth and yelling, "BAH-SEE! HERE BOSSY, BOSSY" and watching the two milk cows amble to the barn. Leo also gathers firewood, mends fences, and looks after Joe and Bob, the two draft horses. Joe and Bob pull the hay wagon and help during harvest time, hauling the wheat and corn to the barn. Leo loves combing them down after a hard day in the field.

Leo's head was spinning with thoughts of his family and the Stach school. Will the school look the same inside? Where will he sit? Are there any new students this year? Leo just couldn't fall asleep!

- Describe where Leo lives.
- What does Leo do on the farm?
- What does Margaret do on the farm?
- Compare Leo & Margaret's chores to your own chores.

Going to School

Part II: Leo's Family

Leo's family has lived on the same farm for a long time. Leo's grandparents came to Kansas from Czechoslovakia looking for good land for farming. Times were not so good in Europe and they wanted their family to grow up with all the riches found in America.

When Leo's grandparents had settled in the area, the land was dotted with wild flowers and the tall grasses of the prairie. It was hard work plowing through the roots of Big Bluestem and Switch Grass. His grandfather had sunk his metal spade into the black soil and with a lot of patience and determination, had cleared a nice patch of land for planting corn. Leo was glad that his grandfather hadn't cleared off all the prairie around the farmhouse. He liked seeing the colorful blossoms on the Johnny jump-ups and the prairie roses that grew in the pastures by the creek. His father tells a story about how in 1903 it rained so much so fast that the water in the creek spilled over its bank and flooded the farms. In fact, after the flood, the men in the community decided to move the one-room school to the other side of Dutch Creek where it didn't flood. Leo could not imagine the school being moved across the creek!

- Where did Leo's family live before coming to Kansas?
- What did the land look like before Leo's grandfather started farming?
- What did Leo's grandfather plant?
- What happened in 1903 that impressed Leo?
- How do you think they moved the school across the creek?

Going to School

Part III: The First Day of School

Finally! The first day of school in 1920! Leo woke up early. He pulled on his overalls and rolled up the cuffs, slipped into a long-sleeved button-up shirt, stuck a red handkerchief in his back pocket, laced up his boots (his mother won't let him get Keds even though he really wants them!), and raced downstairs to the kitchen. Since it was such a special day, Mother had fixed him and Margaret pancakes for breakfast. Mother had also made Margaret a new dress for the first day of school. It was green and white checkered and had a bow on the side. She wore a matching green bow in her long hair. Leo thought she looked nice.

"Mother?" he asked, "What time should we leave for school?" He was getting nervous. Some children rode their bicycles and occasionally someone still rode a horse to school, but most kids, like Leo and Margaret, walked.

"Leo, be patient. You will leave the house at 8:30 since school begins at 9:00," she replied. He had plenty of time to finish eating. Mother had packed their lunches too. She had wrapped up their ham sandwiches in wax paper, taken extra care to shine their apples, and stuck two molasses cookies for each of them into their lunch pails. Father came in to join them for breakfast and instructed them to "act properly, pay attention, and study hard." Leo nodded. He really liked school and could not wait to begin his new year.

- What do you think Leo and Margaret will do on their first day?
- What was Leo's father's advice?
- Why would he want his son to do these three things?

Name _____ Date _____

Complete the following activity comparing schools in 1920 and today's schools after your visit to the Stach School at the Kansas Historical Society.

Comparing Schools Now and Then	
In 1920	At _____ in _____. (my school) (date)
The school year lasted 7-8 months, 5 days a week.	
The school day went from 9a.m. - 4p.m. There were two recesses and an hour for lunch.	
There was only one teacher for all nine grades (first through ninth). Some schools only had eight grades.	
The pupils' ages ranged from 4-19.	
The school building usually had just one room.	
The school was often named after the person who donated the acre of land it was built on.	
Subjects taught were: reading, writing, orthography, arithmetic, language, penmanship, geography, physiology, agriculture, classics, history, Kansas history, civics, and hygiene.	
The average class size was 35-45 students. One-third were usually absent because of sickness, poor road conditions, or helping out on the farm.	
The pupils played games during recess. There was limited or no playground equipment.	
Pupils would walk up to three miles to school. Some rode a horse or bike; some schools had a bus.	

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Our class is taking a trip to the Stach School on the grounds of the Kansas Museum of History on _____. This is a one-room school that has been restored to its 1920's appearance. We will participate in the "Rural School Days" program designed to provide the experience of attending school in 1920. From 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. we will have a spelling bee, work math problems on slate blackboards, and write lessons with pen and ink.

A museum teacher will lead the class in many activities and will be dressed in period clothes. **We are encouraged to dress up too.** Bibbed overalls, jeans, or wool suit pants with a cotton or flannel shirt and a cap are recommended for boys. Girls in the 1920's wore simple cotton dresses with white or black tights. Leather work shoes or Keds high top tennis shoes are appropriate for boys, leather shoes are suitable for girls. Low lace-up shoes would also be appropriate for either boys or girls. The schoolhouse is heated with a coal stove and cooled by opening the windows. **We may need to bring a jacket or sweater** or even wear long underwear to be comfortable all day.

We will be eating our lunch while at the Stach School, so **we need to bring our lunches that day.** In 1920 pupils might have brought:

Sandwiches made of ham, bacon, cheese, or egg
Fried chicken or ham
Buttered bread (white or corn)
Biscuits with butter and jelly
Raw vegetables

Hard-boiled eggs
Baked potatoes (white or sweet)
Apples, pears or dried fruit
Pie, cake, or cookies

To be authentic, we should wrap foods in waxed paper or brown paper and we should bring an enamel, tin, china, or paper **cup for drinking.**

We hope to learn many things about Kansas' rural school heritage that we can share with you when we return.

Thank you,

